

Murphy, Maloney Call for Hearing on Women's Health, Contraception

Oversight Committee Members
Alarmed at Lack of Women on Feb. Panel

Congressman
Chris Murphy (D-CT) and Congresswoman Carolyn
Maloney (D-NY) today called on House Oversight and Government Reform
Committee Chairman Darrell Issa to schedule a hearing focusing on women's
health issues pertaining to the Administration's recent rule regarding women's
access to contraceptives.

Murphy
and Maloney, both members of the committee, were shocked at the lack of women
represented on the hearing panels, and by Chairman Issa's repeated claims that
the hearing was not about women's health and contraception, but about religious
freedom.

"While
women make up over 50% of our population, 99% of which have used contraceptives
at one point in their lives, only two of
the ten witnesses who testified were
women," wrote Murphy and Maloney. "We contend that women's health is indeed at
the center of this issue, and therefore request you convene a second hearing
that focuses on how the new regulation will impact women, from the perspective
of women."

Full text of Murphy and Maloney's letter:

March 1, 2012

The
Honorable Darrell Issa

Chairman

Oversight
and Government Reform Committee

Rayburn House Office Building

Washington,
DC 20515

Dear
Chairman Issa,

On
February 16th you held a hearing entitled, "Lines Crossed: Separation of Church and State. Has the Obama Administration Trampled on Freedom of Religion and Freedom of Conscience?" While the hearing was a result of the Administration's recent rule regarding women's access to contraceptives, women and women's health were far from the focus. In fact, you, Subcommittee Chairman Lankford, and other Republican members, repeatedly stated that the hearing, and the issue at hand, was not about women's health and contraception, but instead about religious freedom. We contend that women's health is indeed at the center of this issue, and therefore request you convene a second hearing that focuses on how the new regulation will impact women, from the perspective of women.

The
viewpoint of religious leaders and affiliates is certainly important in discussing the Department of Health and Human Service's regulation regarding preventive health services for women, including birth control. That is why we are glad that we were able to hear that perspective during the hearing.
Yet, that was the only
perspective we heard. While the Majority had nine witnesses, of which only two were women, the Minority was denied even one. We invited third-year Georgetown University Law Center student Sandra Fluke to discuss the repercussions that denying coverage for contraceptive would have on women. Yet, you shut her out citing that, as relayed by your staff, "...the hearing is not about reproductive rights and contraception but instead about the Administration's actions as they relate to freedom of religion and conscience...."

Not
only was the dissenting voice of Ms. Fluke stifled from being heard, but so was a representational voice of all women. While women make up over 50% of our population, 99% of which have used contraceptives at one point in their lives, only two of the ten witnesses who testified were women. Instead, the committee spent the day questioning a predominately male witness panel about a critical issue to women's health - access to birth control. Representative Lankford's untrue contention that "women's health is not the issue....and that contraceptives are available for free all around the country," only highlights the need to bring women's voices to this issue.

Birth

control has been revolutionary for women. The ability to plan one's family and other health benefits of birth control are crucial aspects of gender equality and economic empowerment of women. Yet, in 2012 women are still being marginalized from debate concerning their own lives. Even worse, there is failure here on the behalf of the Republican members of this committee to even acknowledge that women, not just religious beliefs, are what this debate is and should be about.

Again,
we urge you to expeditiously schedule a hearing regarding the other side of this issue - women's health. It should go without saying that, unlike what we saw earlier this month, such a hearing should include both Majority and Minority witnesses and better reflect the demographic most affected by this new rule: women.

Thank
you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

CHRISTOPHER
S. MURPHY
B. MALONEY

CAROLYN

Member of Congress
of Congress

Member

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